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ABSTRACT

This annotated bibliography contains 10 items addressing speaking and listening assessment methodology. Specific topics include: (1) a national survey of state practices; (2) criteria for minimal high school requirements; (3) recommendations for instrument development; (4) the impact of listening on other language arts; (5) measuring oral communication; (6) guidelines for planning listening assessments; and (7) assessment at the college level. Items include the "Massachusetts Assessment of Basic Skills 1979-80, Summary Report: Speaking and Listening" and a guide, "Resources for Assessment in Communication," developed by the Speech Communication Association (SCA). (JW)

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Speaking & Listening Assessment

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Speaking & Listening Assessment

BACKLUND, PHILIP, et al. *A National Survey of State Practices in Speaking and Listening Skill Assessment.* Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1982, 48 pp.

For decades, research, curriculum development and assessment procedures in oral communication have lagged far behind developments in other basic skill areas. But with speaking and listening now viewed as an essential basic skill, many states and school districts are actively seeking quality instructional materials as well as realistic and appropriate assessment procedures. To assist them, the Speech Communication Association's Task Force on Assessment and Testing has compiled a recent, comprehensive summary of statewide assessment practices.

To complete the study, task force members surveyed each state requesting information on learning objectives for speaking and listening programs, assessment plans and instruments, skills and grade levels assessed and uses for assessment results.

The study reveals that states differ markedly in the development of programs. Nineteen states, for example, have no communication programs, and no immediate plans to develop them. Fourteen states intend to develop programs but have not begun to plan specific activities. Other states, however, are moving rapidly to develop assessment procedures as well as instructional materials.

Four states – Hawaii, Indiana, Massachusetts and New Hampshire – have identified speaking and/or listening skills, and plan statewide assessments. For example, Massachusetts, in collaboration with the National Assessment of Educational Progress, has identified 14 speaking and 11 listening skills and assessed them statewide.

Eleven states, concentrating their efforts on identifying skills and developing curriculum materials, have not yet established statewide assessment procedures.

And finally, four state projects – Michigan, Pennsylvania, Utah and Vermont – have developed both curriculum and assessment procedures.

After profiling the practices in each state, the task force concluded that information about curriculum and assessment procedures is limited. The task force urged additional coordination among states, development of integrated speaking and listening programs, and careful attention to sound research in developing communication skill assessments.

BASSETT, R.E., WHITTINGTON, N. AND STATON-SPICER, A. "The basics in speaking and listening for high school graduates: What should be assessed?" *Communication Education*, 1978, *27* (4), 293-303.

Recently, many educational agencies have attempted to identify basic skill competencies that students should attain before high school graduation. To help educators specify communication competencies, authors Bassett, Whittington and Staton-Spicer initiated an extensive search for speaking and listening skills required for effective adult living.

In selecting skills as minimal requirements for high school graduation, the researchers first identified three primary criteria. First, the competency must be necessary for adult functioning; second, it must be capable of being developed through public school instruction; third, it must be general enough to apply to students from all subcultures. The actual assessment process, note the authors, should require students to demonstrate their abilities through performance rather than through paper and pencil tests.

From an extensive review of literature on communication proficiencies, the authors found 19 competencies, detailed in the article, which met the specified requirements. These include, in part, using words, pronunciation, and grammar appropriate for a particular situation; identifying main ideas in messages; distinguishing facts from opinions; expressing ideas clearly and concisely; and organizing messages so that others can understand them. Examples are provided of how each skill applies in a variety of contexts, and how the skill might be assessed.

These guidelines can be readily used to develop both local-level curriculum and appropriate assessment procedures; they also provide an important basis for identifying general speaking and listening competencies.

RESOURCES IN PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT presents abstracts of selected publications on important aspects of performance assessment. The selections offer educators easy access to some of the most recent and useful publications available on various important assessment topics. Because space in the bibliography is limited, these references should be viewed as only a representative sample of relevant resources on this topic.

BROWN, KENNETH L., BACKLUND, P., GURRY, J., AND JANDT, F. *Assessment of Basic Speaking and Listening Skills: State of the Art and Recommendations for Instrument Development. Volume I.* Boston, MA: Massachusetts State Department of Education, 1979. 107 pp.

How can we best measure students' speaking and listening proficiencies? What are the characteristics of a quality assessment instrument? In this publication, the authors answer both of these major questions in describing Massachusetts' state-wide speaking and listening assessment.

In planning the assessment, developers specified the following guidelines. First, assessment procedures should require students to actually demonstrate skill as speakers or listeners. Second, communication situations for assessing skills should be familiar to students. Third, assessment ought to involve more than one kind of activity, allowing students to demonstrate skills in interpersonal communications, small group discussions and large and small group interactions. In addition, developers sought an assessment that would measure ability to understand and interpret messages from various media, such as radio and television. Fifteen such guidelines were identified.

A careful review of 71 instruments (all documented in the publication) indicated that no available test met more than half of these criteria, and only a few reached even that plateau. A review of existing statewide assessment practices also showed that speaking and listening assessments were still in their infancy in almost all states.

For these reasons, Massachusetts set about developing its own assessment. They constructed the speaking assessment to be conducted primarily in the natural setting of the classroom, with students being asked to perform familiar activities such as giving information or questioning another's viewpoint. Rating scales described each level of speaking proficiency and provided guidelines to help teachers judge student skills.

The recommendations for a listening assessment emphasize stimulus materials that include common messages, such as newscasts or telephone calls. These are spoken messages, not written passages read aloud—a common and inappropriate practice in many listening tests.

The guidelines, plus an analysis of current instruments and descriptions of prototype tests make this a comprehensive resource document.

LUNDSTEEN, SARA. *Listening: Its Impact at All Levels on Reading and the Other Language Arts.* (Revised edition) Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1979. 199 pp.

Listening, the first language skill young children develop, is critical for the development of other basic skills. A child, for example, reads a selection easier after hearing or talking about it; while a child, deaf from birth, has great difficulty learning to speak. Listening skills, contends the author, significantly influence how children learn.

For this reason, Lundsteen advocates strong school listening programs to improve children's basic skills. Her monograph, moreover, provides a thorough framework for understanding, defining, developing and evaluating listening skills.

According to Lundsteen, listening is "the process by which spoken language is converted to meaning in the mind." She then analyzes characteristics of a skilled listener, describing 25 skills needed for listening comprehension. These range from following oral directions and paraphrasing a spoken message to detecting and evaluating the bias and prejudice of a speaker's point of view. She also discusses children's listening problems, how to screen for them and what a teacher can do to help students overcome those problems.

The "best" listener, states Lundsteen, is the one who most consistently comprehends the speaker's meanings in the least time, in the most varied circumstances, and over the widest variety of spoken material. To evaluate these abilities and select appropriate instructional methods, she acknowledges, tests are necessary. But because listening has lacked an integrated conceptual base, all tests must be reviewed critically to determine if they cover important skills.

To help educators select appropriate evaluation tools, Lundsteen reviews standardized and unpublished tests, and suggests a variety of informal approaches to check student proficiency. In addition, the appendices contain lists of commercially published as well as unpublished listening materials, providing a useful resource for teaching and evaluating listening skills in the classroom.

MCCALEB, JOSEPH. "Measuring oral communication." *English Education*, 1979, *1* (1), 41-47.

Speaking skills are less likely to be assessed than any other area of language arts; when they are, teachers rely almost exclusively on evaluating students' public speaking abilities. Assessment of interpersonal speaking competence is totally lacking in most classrooms, states McCaleb. And since what is tested is often what is taught, interpersonal speaking—an important communication skill—is often ignored in school curricula.

The *Center for Performance Assessment*, a research and dissemination project funded by the National Institute of Education, serves educators by conducting research on performance assessment—the observation and rating of student behavior and/or products—and by disseminating resource information on this assessment method. Established at the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in 1973, the Center develops bibliographies, monographs and a regular newsletter entitled CAPTRENDS, and conducts workshops. It also provides technical consultation to educators on the development and use of performance assessment to measure students' skills. For information on publications and services provided by the Center, please contact:

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McCaleb notes that students' speaking proficiency in everyday settings can be readily assessed by observing personal interactions, interviews between students, or role playing simulations. During an interview, for example, students can use questions to probe each other's ability to inform or persuade, to express feelings or to describe an imaginary situation.

When assessing oral communication, it is important to construct as accurate a picture as possible of a student's overall speaking skills. To do so, the author recommends: (1) having students perform a variety of speaking tasks, since skill may vary from one task to another; (2) reducing the anxiety of the speaking exchange (student-to-student interviews are less anxiety-provoking than student-to-adult); and (3) maintaining students' motivation to perform by using interesting communication tasks and topics and by clearly explaining the purpose and the importance of the speaking assessment. Constructing speaking assessments along these lines, notes McCaleb, will help teachers develop valid strategies for assessing speaking proficiency while at the same time allowing for more diverse communication opportunities to be built into the curriculum.

Massachusetts Department of Education. *Massachusetts Assessment of Basic Skills 1979–80, Summary Report: Speaking and Listening*, September 1980, 56 pp.

In 1979-80, 2,900 12th grade students participated in a statewide speaking and listening assessment as part of the Massachusetts assessment of basic skills. The students, representing urban, rural, industrial and suburban areas, came from 49 high schools throughout the state. This well written summary describes the how, why and what of that testing experience.

The Massachusetts' group, in collaboration with staff from the National Association for Educational Progress, devised both a listening and a speaking test. The listening test, which consisted of six tape-recorded messages and associated multiple choice test items, included such common listening situations as a news story, a conversation and a commercial. Unlike most listening tests, all test items and instructions were read aloud to minimize the effect of students' reading ability on listening performance. Stimulus materials were typical spoken exchanges, like a telephone conversation, rather than written passages read aloud. The listening skills tested ranged from basic recognition of words and phrases used by the speaker, to ability to understand and identify main ideas, to the student's ability to summarize information and draw conclusions.

In the speaking assessment, two measurement methods were used: (1) two teachers with the same student enrolled in classes, independently observed and rated the student's general speaking performance; and (2) students participated with evaluators in one-on-one speaking tasks. A carefully specified set of rating scales helped raters evaluate four dimensions of speaking—delivery, organization, content, language and usage—in both classroom and individual assessments.

Students in the one-on-one assessments, completed four speaking tasks—a description, an emergency, a sequence and a persuasive talk. Although all groups performed well on both measures, a few statistically significant differences did appear. On the one-on-one measure, students from large cities and from middle socio-economic backgrounds performed significantly lower than students statewide. On the average, student ratings based on teacher observations indicated that those from higher socio-economic backgrounds performed significantly better than middle or lower groups.

For teachers devising their own assessments, this monograph's complete description of listening and speaking items as well as its rating guides for assessing delivery, organization, content and language should prove very helpful.

Mead, Nancy A. *Issues Related to Assessing Listening Ability*. Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 1978, 16 pp., ED 155 759.

Listening skills may not necessarily be measured effectively using current methodology, concludes Mead and her associates in a pilot listening assessment. The listening assessment, sponsored by the National Assessment of Educational Progress and the Speech Communication Association, focused on several communication purposes, including communication to inform and to control or persuade. Emphasizing both formal and informal listening situations, items included an informative and persuasive speech, a telephone call, a newscast, and a political announcement. Associated test items required students to recall significant details, comprehend main ideas, interpret and draw inferences, and make judgments about the speaker and information presented.

The test materials, administered to a wide range of students at sites around the country, provided results that were both encouraging and thought provoking. While an item analysis suggested that the testing materials were appropriate for use with students similar to those in the field test sample, about half the test items showed a significant relationship between racial/ethnic classification and performance. An advisory group, convened to analyze test results, found very few indications of bias, such as type of speaking situation presented or speech style used in the testing materials. But they speculated that such factors as vocabulary, length of speech, interest in the content presented, accent, delivery rate or test environment may have contributed to the performance differences.

These results prompted the researchers to recommend the following important guidelines to those planning a listening assessment: First, focus on skills that are unique to listening, particularly those that involve responding to spoken rather than written language. Spoken language, unlike written text, tends to be nonlinear, incomplete, redundant and often accompanied by nonverbal cues. Consequently, different skills are used to comprehend auditory and written messages. Second, use short, interesting listening stimuli to increase students' motivation and encourage them to try their hardest on test items. Third, consider extraneous factors which might contribute to item bias, and be certain to include very careful item development, review of items by minority reviewers and appropriate item analysis strategies in developing local or statewide tests.

Details on these recommendations are essential reading for educators who develop a communication assessment.

RUBIN, DONALD L., DALY, J., MCCROSKEY, J., AND MEAD, N. "A review and critique of procedures for assessing speaking and listening skills among preschool through grade twelve students." *Communication Education*, 1982, *31*, 287-303.

The key to effective speaking and listening assessment is a careful analysis of available tests in relation to state and local needs. To help educators conduct such an analysis, and select a suitable measure of spoken and written capabilities, Donald Rubin and associates reviewed and evaluated 45 published tests. The results of their study, including their comments on key test selection issues, test measurement strategies (response and scoring methods), administration procedures, target groups and potential sources of test bias, are presented in this article.

The authors conclude that assessments now available do not offer totally satisfactory solutions to important measurement problems. A review of numerous unexplored research concerns underlines those problems. For example, existing speaking and listening tests cover more skills than many schools teach. Consequently, students may be tested on materials they have not been taught.

In addressing the quality of the tests, the authors note that tests' quality control research deals inadequately with such issues as test/retest reliability or equivalence between various test topics or tasks. Other aspects of current assessments also need careful examination and further research, contend the researchers. Do test results, for example, from an interview accurately reflect the student's competence in a natural communication setting? Do factors such as the impact of time of day, mental and physical state of the student and amount of prior "coaching" on test results affect outcomes? Are tests being selected to match the purpose for testing; that is, will the tests produce the information actually needed? Many of these questions, assert the authors, still need to be answered before large-scale speaking and listening assessments are developed and conducted by the states. Review of these research questions, moreover, alert teachers and test developers to potential problem areas in new and existing assessments.

RUBIN, REBECCA A. "Assessing speaking and listening competence at the college level: The communication competency assessment instrument." *Communication Education*, Volume 31, January 1982, 19-32.

Elementary and high school students are not the only students who have difficulty mastering speaking and listening skills. In the last few years, colleges have become more aware that their students also lack these skills. Since assessment is the first step in remediation, communication staff at the University of Wisconsin, Parkside, developed the Communication Competency Assessment Instrument (CCAI) in 1978 as part of a basic skills program.

The CCAI contains three parts. The first part calls for students to talk extemporaneously for three minutes on a topic of interest. Raters judge performance on six counts, ranging from pronunciation and facial expression to ability to express and defend a point of view. Part two requires students to view a six and one-half minute videotaped lecture, then answer four questions, during which they are assessed on their ability to differentiate between fact and opinion, understand suggestions and summarize. In part three, students respond to statements about various educational experiences. Their ability to ask and answer questions, express feelings, use a topical order and describe differences in opinion are evaluated. The assessments require 30 minutes, and none of the test situations require writing or reading.

The rating system of the CCAI uses five skill level designations for each assessment item (5 = superior, 1 = unacceptable). Each skill level contains a precise description of appropriate student behavior.

"Classrooms are communication areas in which students and teachers must interact and communicate," state CCAI developers. "Students with speaking and listening deficiencies need help if they are to survive. The CCAI can be a valuable tool towards this end, as it can serve to diagnose and help develop individualized instructional programs."

SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION. *Resources for Assessment in Communication*. Annandale, VA: National Office of the Speech Communications Association, 1980, 24 pp.

To support the successful assessment of communication skills in the classroom, the Speech Communication Association (SCA) compiled this compact, informative guide. It briefly describes some of the challenges in developing quality communication assessment programs, details criteria for evaluating assessment instruments and procedures, and outlines basic standards for effective communication programs. An annotated bibliography and a list of individuals capable of providing technical assistance are also provided.

Evaluating speaking and listening skills in the context of social interaction, notes SCA, is challenging, but possible. Fifteen specific criteria are provided to help educators review published and unpublished tests and establish procedures for assessing speaking and listening skills.

These criteria, developed by a special task force of SCA members, offer clear assessment guidelines for local and statewide programs. Those being tested must actually demonstrate skills as a speaker or listener. Tests of reading comprehension, for example, should not be read aloud to measure listening skills. Test activities should emphasize application of speaking and listening in familiar situations. Also, skills important in various communication settings (e.g., interpersonal, small group, public settings) should all be assessed. Technical quality, as well as test content issues specified in the criteria, urge those conducting assessments to verify the reliability of test outcomes and ascertain that results be more than just a chance occurrence.

These criteria for evaluating testing procedures are accompanied by standards for evaluating the content of instructional programs. Together, they offer a series of relevant materials for initiating and assessing the effectiveness of speaking and listening programs.